

BROADBAND EXPANSION GRANT APPLICATION

For Fiscal Year 2022

 Public Service Commission of Wisconsin
 RECEIVED: 03/16/2022 3:44:12 PM

| | |
|--|--|
| Primary Applicant (Name and Address): Starwire Technologies PO BOX 428 Siren, WI 54872 | Applications MUST be UPLOADED to ERF via the Commission's website, http://psc.wi.gov/apps35/ERF_upload/content/mymenu.aspx . Refer to section 2.3 for detailed instructions. Applications are due and MUST be uploaded to ERF no later than: March 17, 2022 at 4:00pm (16:00) Central Time. Late applications will not be accepted. |
| | Contact for further information: PSCStatebroadbandoffice@wisconsin.gov |
| | Date: December 1, 2021 |
| <p>The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin is seeking applications for Broadband Expansion Grants. The Commission may award one or more grants during Fiscal Year 2022 to public and private entities that meet the eligibility requirements set forth in Wis. Stat. § 196.504. This grant round will be funded with bond proceeds authorized by the Wisconsin Building Commission pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 13.48(30). As such, successful applicants are subject to the requirements of Wis. Stat. § 13.48(30). Successful applicants will demonstrate a clear and achievable plan to improve broadband communications services in one or more underserved areas in the State.</p> | |
| <p>Applicant Certification: In signing this application, the undersigned verifies under penalty of perjury that the Applicant and its employees and agents have not, either directly or indirectly, entered into any agreement or participated in any collusion or otherwise taken any action in restraint of free competition with respect to this application; that no attempt has been made to induce any other person or firm to submit or not to submit an application; that this application has been independently arrived at without collusion with any other proposer, competitor or potential competitor; that this application has not been knowingly disclosed prior to the opening of applications to any other applicant or competitor; that all of the responses and representations of Applicant in this application are true and correct to the best of the undersigned's knowledge, information, and belief; and that Applicant agrees to, accepts, and will comply with all of the terms and conditions respecting this application and any award of a broadband expansion grant as may be established in a grant award Agreement.</p> | |
| Name of Authorized Representative (Type or Print) Joe Cremin | Title Owner |
| Phone 877-679-4242 | |
| Signature of Authorized Representative  | Date 3/14/2022 |

SUMMARY OF GRANT APPLICATION

| | |
|--|---|
| Primary Applicant Name Starwire Technologies | Amount of Broadband Grant Request (round to nearest dollar) \$960,000 (60%) |
| Federal Employer Identification No. 20-8504088 | Amount of Matching Funds Pledged (round to nearest dollar) \$640,000 (40%) |
| Contact Name and Title Joe Cremin, Owner | Total Cost of Proposed Project (round to nearest dollar) \$1,600,000 |
| Telephone Number 877-679-4242 | Project Name Town of McKinley |
| E-mail Address(es) joe@starwire.net | Type of Proposed Broadband Service (FTTH, Cable, DSL, etc.) FTTH |
| Grant Manager, if different than Primary Applicant | Type of Proposed Project (Last-mile, Middle-Mile, backbone, other) Last Mile |
| Grant Manager Contact Name | Grant Manager Email Address and Telephone Number |
| If the application proposes a public-private partnership, list the names, addresses, and FEINs of the partner companies or organizations Starwire Technologies, LLC – Private Partner Oak Forest – Non-Profit Partner - 2824 130th St, Frederic, WI 54837 Town of McKinley – Public Partner - 2527 15th St., Cumberland WI 54829 Polk County – Public Partner - 100 Polk County Plaza, Balsam Lake, WI 54810 | |
| Brief Project Description (2 sentences) Starwire will expand upon the Fiber to the Home (FTTH) network under construction from the Indian Creek Phase 2 project and will build roughly 40 miles of mainline fiber cable to additional businesses and residents in the Town of McKinley, the Town of Luck, and just outside of Lewis. | |
| Maximum Proposed Download Transmission Speed 1 Gbps | Maximum Proposed Upload Transmission Speed 1 Gbps |
| Minimum Proposed Download Speed to Customer Location 100 Mbps | Minimum Proposed Upload Transmission Speed to Customer Location 100 Mbps |
| County or Counties served by this project Polk County | Community or Communities served by this project Town of McKinley, Town of Luck, Lewis |

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>List of the broadband service providers, if any, currently serving the area the applicant proposes to serve</p> <p>CenturyLink is the only provider in the proposed project area</p> | |
| <p>Does proposed project serve an <u>unserved</u> area of the State, as defined in Section 1.4 of the application instruction? (yes/no)</p> <p>Maybe... according to CenturyLink's web site it is not unserved, but actual reports from residents indicate service does not always maintain a minimum of 5mbps leading us to consider it 85% unserved.</p> | <p>Is the Applicant certified as a Broadband Forward! Community or Telecommuter Forward! Community, or does the grant project propose to serve a Broadband Forward! Community or Telecommuter Forward! Community? (yes/no)</p> <p>Yes!</p> |
| <p>For last mile projects or component the expected number of Business Locations that will have access to the improved broadband service (i.e., total business locations passed or with new service access). Approx 25</p> | <p>For last mile projects or components the expected number of Residential Locations that will have access to the improved broadband service (i.e., total residential locations passed or with new service access). Approx 189</p> |
| <p>Of the improved business locations, how many locations are <i>unserved</i>? This is a difficult question to answer, see more info in the application.</p> | <p>Of the improved residential locations, how many are <i>unserved</i>? This is a difficult question to answer, see more info in the application.</p> |
| <p>For providers that are eligible telecommunications carriers will the proposed broadband service be available to Lifeline customers? (yes/no) No.</p> | <p>Are there any programs available for low-income households to access low-cost service or discounts? (yes/no)</p> <p>Yes!</p> |
| <p>Is the internet service provider currently participating in the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program? (yes/no)</p> <p>No</p> | <p>Is the internet service provider currently participating in the Department of Public Instruction and CESA purchasing's Digital Learning Bridge? (yes/no) No</p> |
| <p>Did the internet service provider participate in the Public Service Commission's voluntary Broadband Coverage Data Collection in 2021? (yes/no) Yes!</p> | |

FY22 Broadband Expansion Grant Application

Budget & Income Summary



Please complete this form using Microsoft Excel. A PDF copy must be attached to your application as page four. In addition, this form must also be uploaded to ERF in Excel format.

Grant Summary

| Grant Applicant: | Project: |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| Starwire Technologies | Town of McKinley |

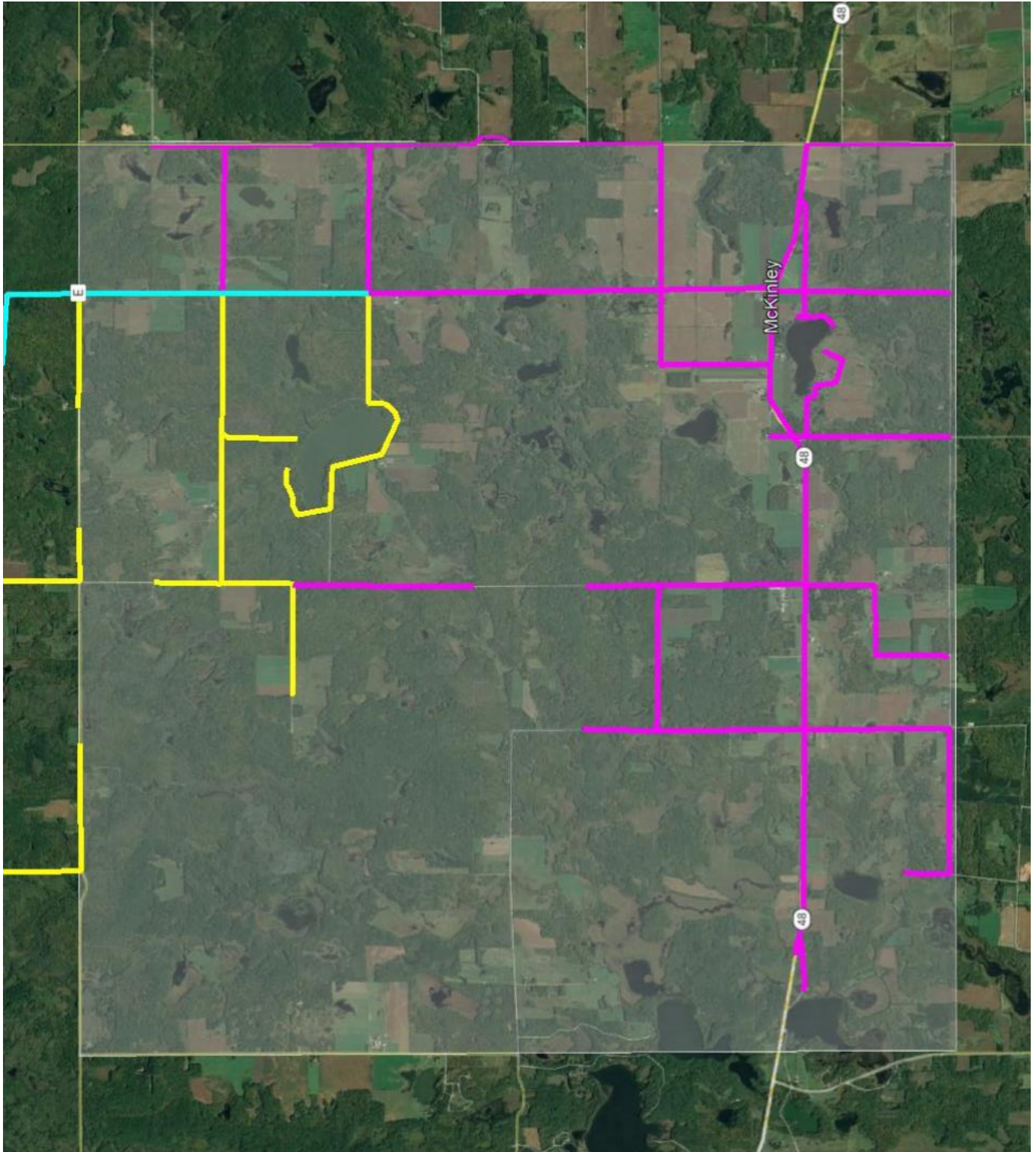
Budget

| Line: | Description / Category: | Grant Funds: | Match: | Total: |
|--------|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Contractual, Consultant Fees | \$ 792,000.00 | \$ 528,000.00 | \$ 1,320,000.00 |
| 2 | Equipment | \$ 168,000.00 | \$ 112,000.00 | \$ 280,000.00 |
| 3 | Supplies | | | \$ - |
| 4 | Labor (Salary, Fringe) | | | \$ - |
| 5 | Permitting, Licensing Fees | | | \$ - |
| 6 | Travel | | | \$ - |
| 7 | Other | | | \$ - |
| Total: | | \$ 960,000.00 | \$ 640,000.00 | \$ 1,600,000.00 |
| | | | | 40.0% match requested |

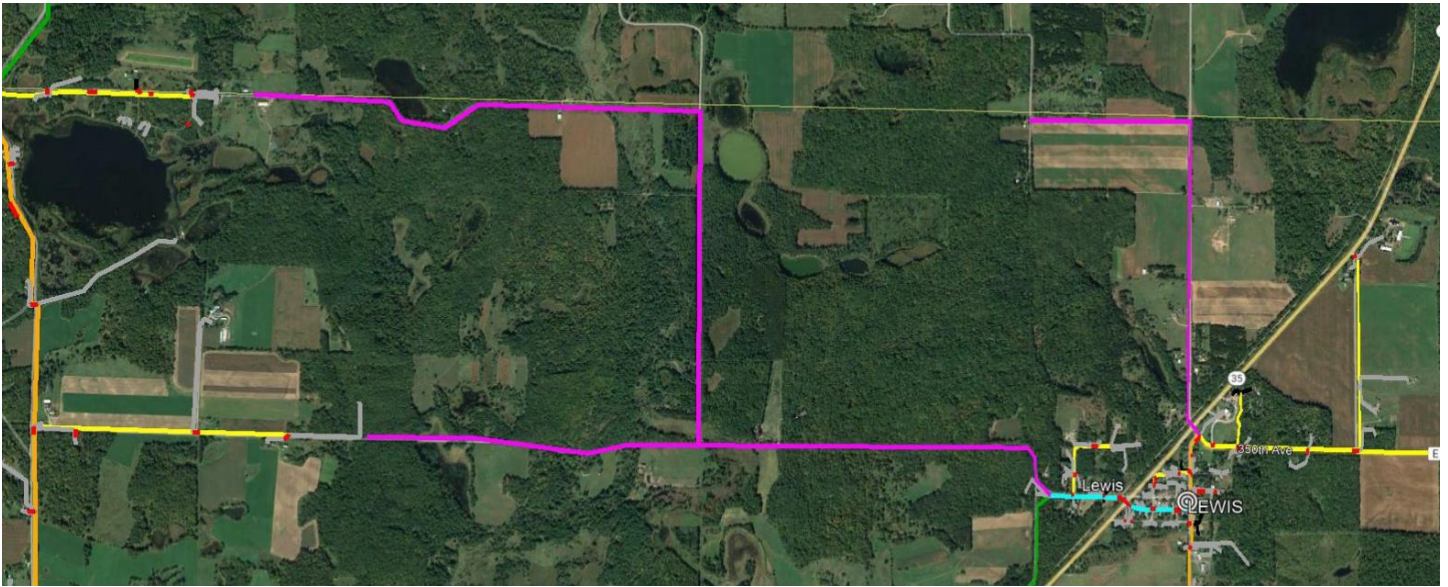
Pledged Contributions

| #: | Entity: | Entity Type: | Pledge Type: | Pledge: |
|--------|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1 | Starwire Technologies | Applicant | Cash | \$ 410,000.00 |
| 2 | Polk County | Partner | Cash | \$ 200,000.00 |
| 3 | Town of McKinley | Partner | Cash | \$ 18,000.00 |
| 4 | Oak Forest | Partner | Cash | \$ 12,000.00 |
| 5 | | | | |
| 6 | | | | |
| 7 | | | | |
| 8 | | | | |
| 9 | | | | |
| 10 | | | | |
| Total: | | | | \$ 640,000.00 |

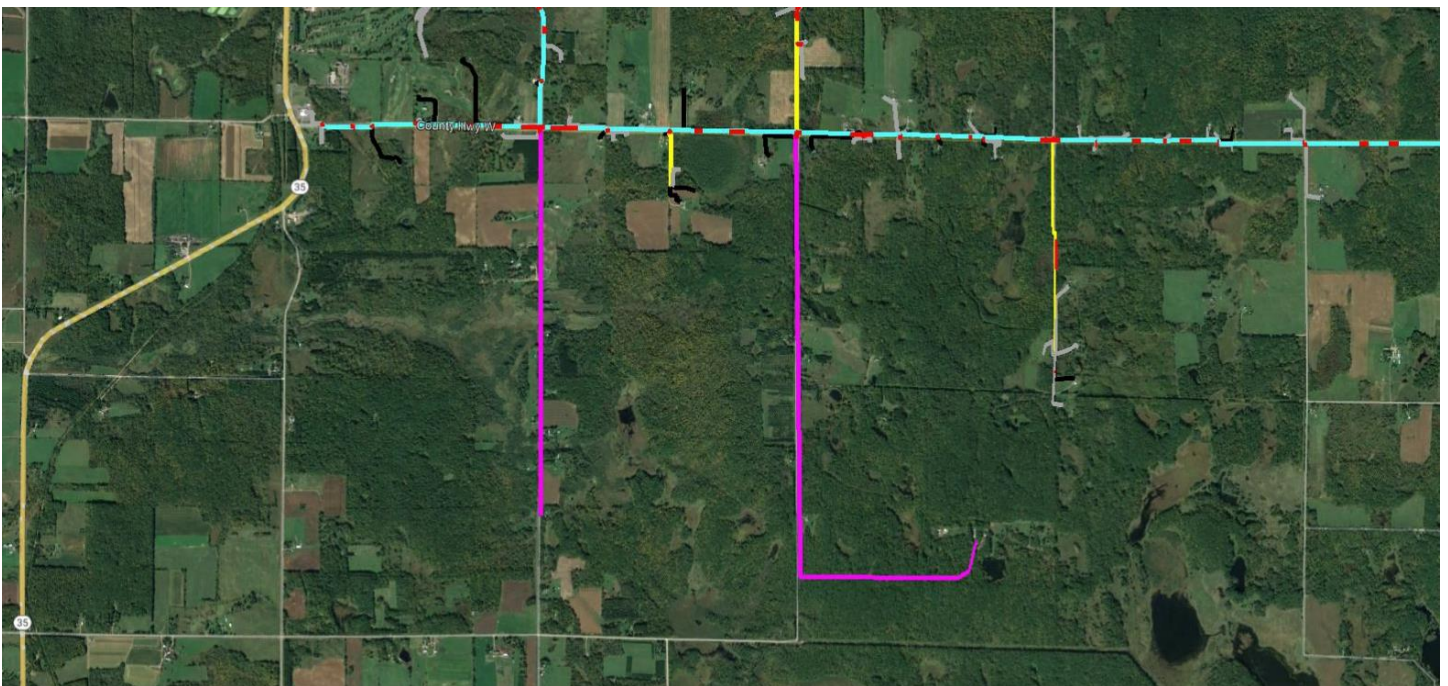
Aqua and yellow lines represent Starwire's existing or under construction fiber network. Magenta lines represent the proposed fiber network in the town of McKinley. Shaded box is the Town of McKinley.



Green, yellow, orange, and aqua lines represent Starwire's existing fiber network. Magenta lines represent the proposed fiber network in Lewis.



Yellow and aqua lines represent Starwire's existing fiber network. Magenta lines represent the proposed fiber network in the town of Luck.



1. Executive Summary

This project would expand on the currently under construction Indian Creek Phase 2 project made possible by a FY2022 ARPA Broadband Grant. This project proposes to build upon the Fiber to the Home network in Polk County, which would bring broadband service to all residents in the Town of McKinley that currently do not have fiber optic broadband service. It will also add coverage in parts of the town of Luck and just outside of Lewis that currently do not have broadband. The project will deliver a fiber optic connection directly to every home and business along the route, with plenty of spare capacity to expand in the future.

The only option currently available to these homes and businesses is slow and unreliable CenturyLink DSL. The proposed project area is vastly unserved from CenturyLink, as demonstrated by CenturyLink's own web site showing the lack of broadband service available. While a small number of locations in the project area show that broadband service is available, it rarely performs at broadband speeds and sometimes doesn't work at all. The fiber optic network would allow us to offer speeds of up to 1 gigabit, far surpassing the options currently available, and much faster than anything CenturyLink would be able to offer even if they were to upgrade their DSL infrastructure in the future.

Because of the beautiful "Up North" landscape that Polk County provides, many tourists visit the area for camping, hiking, and other recreational activities. Every single resident and tourist would benefit from the project as it would allow more people to work from home, it would allow seasonal and weekend visitors to stay longer, and it would help children and college students do their homework and research without needing to drive to nearby villages just to get online. Awarding this grant would make many dreams come true that would otherwise be impossible.

2. Statement of applicant's ability to undertake the project

Starwire Technologies was founded in 2007 from an intense need for competition and reliable service in our rural areas. The service that the residents and businesses were receiving from the phone companies was unreliable and the customer service was horrible. Our goal and mission statement and the reason we exist is as follows: "We aim to raise the standard for customer service and better our community by providing a reliable high-speed Internet service to those who live in areas that are unserved or underserved." Starwire files Form 477 with the FCC to report data for both fixed-wireless and fiber deployments.

Since 2007 we have built a reliable fixed-wireless network consisting of over 50 towers and other broadcast points throughout Polk and Burnett Counties in Wisconsin and Pine County in Minnesota. We began constructing our first fiber network in 2017, and since then (and with the help of previous Broadband Grants) have constructed over 100 miles of mainline fiber. We look forward to continuing to expand the coverage of our fiber network. This grant will lay the groundwork for us to not only serve a community that is desperate, but will also position Starwire to continue to expand our fiber network in order to serve many more people.

Starwire received its first Broadband Expansion Grant from the PSC for FY2019 in the Town of Clam Falls. In FY2020, Starwire received a Phase 2 grant which more than doubled the size of the initial Clam Falls build. We also received a FY2020 CARES grant for portions of Clam Falls, and despite the short timeframe, the project was completed successfully and on-time. In FY 2021, we were awarded 3 additional grants, which continue to expand on the previous projects and are getting more people connected and online. And in the FY2022 ARPA grant cycle, we were awarded the Indian Creek Phase 2 project directly north of this proposed project, which is what made the majority of this proposed project possible. All projects have completed

construction on time, and the projects still under construction are all on track to be completed on time as well. We are very thankful and fortunate for these opportunities, and we hope we have shown the state that we can take on future projects by delivering exactly what we promised.

The opportunity to build a fiber optic network with the help of this grant will allow us to achieve our mission statement with greater ease. It is a pleasure for us to be able to say that around 90% of our customers are sent to us by referrals. In the small-town setting where we are located, that is a major accomplishment and something to be proud of. Our reputation is what this company is built on. We don't think about providing service to customers identified by an account number. The people who use our service are our neighbors, our friends, and our families. We know that we are going to run into these people in town, and when we do, we want to know that they are happy with the service we provide to them.

Part of our goal is to be open and honest with our customers. It's about taking the time to help them find the source of any issue, whether it really is an issue with their service or something on their end and helping to find the correct solution. It's about knowing how to calm the frustrations when they have been treated poorly by another provider and expressing to them that we care about them.

We have spent a lot of time planning this grant with the mindset of providing the best value to the taxpayers as possible. Every bit of engineering has been based on making sure that the network is very reliable and can grow to meet all of the future needs, while also making sure that it is carefully designed to be efficient and not waste any money.

3. Statement of need for high-speed, reliable, and affordable broadband

CenturyLink is the only wireline provider in the project area. There are no fixed wireless providers. Cell phone service where it is available is not a suitable replacement for a reliable and consistent home/business internet service. Further, we could find no evidence of any providers who plan to build and offer 100mbps service.

The proposed project area is vastly underserved from CenturyLink, as demonstrated by CenturyLink's own web site showing the lack of broadband service available. CenturyLink offers a fairly flat rate of approximately \$50/mo regardless of what speed they can provide. We checked many addresses within the proposed project area on CenturyLink's web site, and only a small number of addresses were listed as being offered more than 10mbps. Feedback from all CenturyLink customers regardless of the speed they are purchasing is that the actual delivered speed is quite often much lower than advertised, especially during evening hours or during bad weather. Therefore, we conclude that much of the area should be classified as unserved as no provider is currently offering reliable broadband service. While enough for some basic functions for a single person, the speeds currently available are not adequate for most bandwidth intensive applications, or families of people all trying to use the same connection at once.

Our completed projects have shown that bringing better broadband internet service to the area allows tourists to spend more time visiting the area, which has helped support the local economy. Many of the people who travel to the area live in the Twin Cities and are required to have fast and reliable access for their work. Better internet access availability allows tourist to frequent the area more often and for longer periods of time.

A large portion of the population is made up of cabin folks. Not only would more people choose to make these cabins their full-time homes, but those who are seasonal or weekend visitors would be able to spend full weeks or extended weekends in the area, instead of having to leave sooner to go back home for work. That money

goes directly into the local economy which supports our local restaurants, grocery stores, and shops. We witnessed this firsthand during the Covid-19 pandemic. Those who couldn't get a reliable connection were forced to stay out of the area because travel was higher risk, while those who did have broadband spent the entire summer in the area, and some simply sold their city house and moved here full time.

Fiber to the home increases the value of homes, improving the real estate market. Homes will increase in monetary value, plus having fast and reliable broadband service available will attract many potential buyers who may otherwise choose to live in a different area due to their reliance on broadband connectivity. It has been shown time and time again that having fiber to the home is beneficial to economic development in many ways.

The awarding of this grant will have a large affect in changing the dynamics of who chooses to spend time and live in this area. Right now, the population is made up largely of baby boomers and upper end of Generation X, which means most of the recent graduates in the area are about to move out of town, or already have. Having access to "the world" at a speed in which Millennials have grown to expect will invite them to stay, to telecommute, to shop from home, or take that online class that isn't offered at the local school. It will help keep people with wonderful talent in our area, to develop new businesses, and create new jobs.

What we are doing here is not just providing faster 1's and 0's, we are actually improving lives. We are giving folks the ability to stay closer to their parents to help care for them in their aging conditions without having to sacrifice a higher paying job to do so. We are allowing the child on the brink of adulthood the opportunity to take "that class", because without a reliable Internet source, they would have to move to campus, but the family can't afford it.

The lack of any reliable broadband service is also a serious health care issue. If improved internet access were available, it would allow the disabled and aging population to stay in their homes longer and receive better home health care. They will have the ability to utilize medical devices which communicate with health care providers about their medications and will allow them to call for help in the case of an emergency.

The lack of broadband service not only affects work and health care access, it also has negatively affected kids in school. Kids are now being armed with Chromebooks and iPads, and parents are currently unable to purchase suitable internet access for their kids to do their homework. This often means late trips to town (which can mean a 10+ mile trip one way) in search of a WI-FI connection, often done from a not so comfortable car in an establishment's parking lot. Bringing fast and reliable internet service to the area will enable both kids and college students access to learning materials from home, allowing them to complete their schoolwork from their own home.

To stress the importance of this point, we highly encourage everyone reading this application to take 5 minutes to check out the following link: www.starwire.net/homework – which will redirect to a YouTube video that really gives a great example and perspective on the difference having internet access at home makes for kids trying to do homework, or just learn in general.

Lastly, this project will create jobs for the construction of the network and will continue to support additional jobs after construction in order to support the network and its continued expansion.

4. Project Proposal

a. Technology and network design

The proposed project will use Gigabit Passive Optical Network (GPON) technologies to deploy a Fiber to the Home (FTTH) network to the businesses and residents in the proposed project area. This technology is capable of delivering dedicated broadband speeds to every home and business, with the highest reliability and the lowest latency of any other technology. This network allows us to offer Gigabit speed internet services, as demonstrated by the thousands of providers who have chosen GPON as their fiber network technology.

Through our experience deploying fiber to the home, it has been proven that a fiber optic network is the most desired form of Internet delivery to provide fast speeds and high reliability! The fiber also allows for the potential of future services such as telephone and television that could be provided over the same network, or through a lease to other providers utilizing the dark fiber available. The technology can surpass the current needs of broadband internet today and provide a solid long-term investment that can meet the future needs as well.

This project is an extension of our previously awarded projects, demonstrating that we planned appropriately to scale the scope of that project to new areas. As with our other fiber projects, we have engineered and built this GPON network to deliver dedicated bandwidth to each customer, while allowing the system to be expanded to cover new areas once the proposed project area has been completed. Extra fiber will continue to be installed as part of this proposed project to accommodate installing service on every road within the project area without impacting the service of any existing subscribers.

The proposed project would bring service to all of the homes and businesses along the proposed route, but the groundwork will have been laid to expand the service to additional areas simply by continuing to extend the fiber optic cables that would be installed, if this grant were awarded. This network can also be extended into nearby townships who face the same issues with poor or non-existent internet service.

In addition to the future area that this network is capable of covering, the infrastructure can provide other services as well. Increased speeds that can be offered is one of the big factors in choosing fiber optic technology, but given the fact that phone service is unreliable, and the terrain makes receiving television signals difficult, both of those services are being considered to increase the impact of the proposed project.

The only infrastructure that exists is old copper phone cables, thus CenturyLink is not able to reliably offer broadband services to most areas. This grant will bring MUCH faster speeds than what CenturyLink can currently offer or would be able to offer even with the fastest DSL technologies. In addition, there is currently no competition, so residents don't have a choice of providers.

b. Affordability, digital literacy, and internet access

Our pricing is very straightforward. There are no hidden fees or surprises for our customers. None of our plans have any caps. Current pricing is as follows:

- 100/100 for \$68/mo
- 200/200 for \$88/mo
- 300/300 for \$108/mo
- 500/500 for \$148/mo
- 1000/1000 for \$248/mo

Rather than get involved with the red tape and overhead of dealing with the federal discount programs, we have decided to offer our own discount to customers who need it. Any customer who expresses financial hardship is given multiple assistance options. One simple option is a payment plan for those who just need more time to pay. Another option is a 50% discounted monthly rate for 6 months, at which time the need for the discount is re-evaluated. We find this is much simpler for us and our customers as we do not need to have staff members spend extra time with reporting, and our customers do not need to fill out any applications.

5. Partnerships and community engagement

The proposed project includes multiple partners.

First, a very significant public-private partnership with Polk County. Not only will Polk County continue to waive all permits and ROW fees for Broadband Expansion Grant recipients, but they have also passed a resolution contributing \$200,000 in cash towards the project. The resolution is included at the end of this application. The Polk County board of supervisors has also made the entire county a Broadband Forward Community. These actions speak very highly of such a small community, showing what can happen when there is such a high demand for better internet service.

Secondly, the Town of McKinley has joined us as another public partner and will be contributing an additional \$18,000 to the project through a resolution passed by the town board of supervisors. This is still a significant investment as the town has chosen to spend approximately half of their ARPA funds through this partnership. That resolution is also included later in the application.

Lastly and certainly not least, the Oak Forest Retreat (a non-profit Christian ministry) has partnered with us and will contribute \$12,000 towards the cost of the project. This is also a very significant investment as Oak Forest is funded heavily from donations and fundraisers, so their budget is small to begin with.

Through the multiple partnerships, you can see that the entire community has come together to support this project.

6. Timeline

If Starwire is awarded the grant for the proposed project, work would start immediately to secure the remaining materials for the project. Since lead times are quite long for many materials, sometimes approaching a full year, we have worked with our vendors and contractors to pre-order many materials in anticipation of the project and

most of the materials needed would be available for us by this summer. While our construction crews finish the remaining projects that are already underway, we will complete the remaining engineering, secure all permits, and begin ordering any other equipment needed for the project. We anticipate completion of this project by the end of 2022.

7. Budget Discussion

Starwire Technologies will be making a significant investment into this project. All of the fiber, outside plant, and other networking components will be owned and operated by Starwire Technologies. The grant funds will not subsidize Starwire's operating costs and will be used solely for the construction and associated costs of this project. The grant funds will be used for the sole purpose of constructing a fiber to the home network to the unserved and underserved areas in the proposed project area.

8. Evaluation Criteria at a Glance

To make things easier for the panel reviewing applications, we are adding this section to quickly and briefly describe how this application addresses each of the scoring criteria laid out in the instructions:

a. Matching funds (10 points). An application will receive higher priority based on the percentage of matching funds the applicant proposes to invest in its project and the variety of sources of matching funding provided by partners and others.

Starwire and its partners will contribute 40% of the cost of the project.

b. Public-private partnerships (10 points). An application that includes a city, village, town, or county as a participating partner, in partnership with a telecommunication provider or other private organization and exhibits active community engagement shall receive priority.

This project has 3 partners: Polk County, the Town of McKinley, and Oak Forest (a non-profit Christian organization).

c. Existing broadband service (15 points). An application proposing to serve an unserved area shall receive priority. The priority will be based on the percent of the project that reaches unserved location.

Screenshots taken from CenturyLink's web site shows that most of the area can receive 10mbps, however the speed is an "up to" speed, and according to reports from residents, many times it cannot maintain over 5mbps when it is needed most, leading us to consider the majority of the area is actually unserved. We estimate only 15% of the application area is offered speeds above 10mbps, therefore we would consider that 85% of the project area is unserved.

d. Project impact (15 points). An application that proposes to serve a larger geographic area, a larger number of customers or communities in an area or provide a higher performance service shall receive higher priority than one that serves a comparatively smaller geographic area, fewer number of potential customers or communities in an area or slower service as compared with the cost of the project.

This project focuses on 100% coverage throughout the Town of McKinley along with a couple roads in the Town of Luck and new Lewis which fall between Starwire’s existing fiber coverage, and another provider’s fiber coverage. This is a fairly large geographic area and covers 40 road miles.

e. Scalability (5 points). An application that demonstrates a commitment to increase the size or scope of its broadband network in the future shall receive priority. An application that discusses possible growth potential, but declines to make a specific commitment regarding future growth of the broadband network, shall receive a lesser priority.

The project will install enough spare capacity to enable the scope of this project to be expanding in the future as we have demonstrated with each of our previously awarded grants, all of which built off of each other and made expansion to new areas possible without reinvesting in areas that have already received funding.

f. Economic development (10 points). An application that demonstrates the potential to promote job growth or retention, expand the property tax base or improve the overall economic vitality of the municipality or region shall receive priority.

With the need to support “work from home” jobs, this application excels by proving ample speeds to meet and exceed the needs of remote workers, as well as those who have home-based businesses. The lack of broadband has prevented home sales and business growth, and this project would fix both of those issues for the areas we plan to serve.

g. Effect upon broadband service to adjacent areas (5 points). An application that demonstrates that it will not impair the ability of a competing broadband service provider to extend broadband service to areas adjacent to the proposed project shall receive priority.

This application fills in the gaps between broadband providers and completes coverage throughout the town without impairing any other provider from naturally expanding their footprint in other areas.

We feel the above answers to each scoring criteria demonstrates that we have addressed each category of evaluation and that the application deserves most or all points in each category.

Resolution No. 07-22

| ROLL CALL Board Members | Aye | Nay | Exc. |
|----------------------------|-----|-----|------|
| Olson | ✓ | | |
| Route | ✓ | | |
| Warndahl | ✓ | | |
| Nelson (Chairperson) | ✓ | | |
| LaBlanc | ✓ | | |
| Ruck | ✓ | | |
| Prichard | ✓ | | |
| Kelly | ✓ | | |
| O'Connell | | ✓ | |
| Middleton | ✓ | | |
| Luke (2nd Vice Chair) | ✓ | | |
| Duncanson | | | ✓ |
| Arcand | | | ✓ |
| Bonneprise (Vice Chair) | | ✓ | |
| Demulling | | ✓ | |

BOARD ACTION

Vote Required: 2/3rds Vote

Motion to Approve Adopted ☒

1st Luke Defeated ☐

2nd Olson

Yes: 10 No: 3 Exc. 2

Reviewed by:

Melvin E. Nelson, Corp. Counsel

Reviewed by:

Vince Netherland, Administrator

Reviewed by:

[Signature], Finance

FISCAL & LEGAL IMPACT:

This resolution will amend the 2022 operating and capital budget to allocate \$1.5 million of ARPA funds for Broadband grant expenditures

Certification:

I, Lisa Ross, Clerk of Polk County, hereby certify that the above is a true and correct copy of a resolution that was adopted on the 24th day of February, 2022 by the Polk County Board of Supervisors.

Lisa Ross

Lisa Ross
County Clerk, Polk County

Committee General Government

- ☒ Recommended
☐ Not Recommended
☐ Neutral

Resolution Appropriating ARPA Funds to the Expansion of Broadband in Polk County Through Local Provider Matching Grant Funds

1 TO THE POLK COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

2
3 WHEREAS, the Polk County Board of Supervisors recognizes the benefits
4 broadband internet access provides for educational opportunity, economic
5 development, healthcare and quality of life for the citizens of Polk County; and

6
7 WHEREAS, the Polk County Board of Supervisors passed Resolutions 03-
8 18 and 06-18 on February 19, 2018, titled the Polk County Broadband Network
9 Project Ordinance in order to facilitate the development and expansion of
10 broadband internet services available to county residents and designating Polk
11 County as a "Broadband Forward" community; and

12
13 WHEREAS, the County Administrator has worked with an industry expert
14 to create an up to date set of data regarding broadband accessibility and
15 availability in Polk County; and

16
17 Whereas, the County Administrator has engaged with local service
18 providers to identify opportunities for Polk County to further encourage and
19 support the continued growth and expansion of broadband service throughout
20 Polk County; and

21
22 WHEREAS, there are presently opportunities for broadband expansion by
23 local providers in underserved areas of Polk County and such opportunities
24 could be partially funded by grants available from the State of Wisconsin; and

25
26 WHEREAS, the local broadband service providers have developed grant
27 proposals for such opportunities and those proposals are likely more
28 successful if financial support from Polk County could be made part of those
29 applications; and

30
31 WHEREAS, Polk County received ARPA funds totaling \$4,252,167 in May
32 of 2021 a remaining amount of \$1,033,667 has yet to be designated for use by
33 the Polk County Board of Supervisors; and

34
35 WHEREAS, Polk County expects to receive ARPA funds totaling
36 \$4,252,167 in May of 2022 and the entirety of that amount has yet to be
37 designated for use by the Polk County Board of Supervisors; and

38
39 WHEREAS, one of the stated intents of the American Rescue Plan
40 legislation was for the expansion of broadband connectivity;

41
42 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Polk County Board of
43 Supervisors designates \$1,000,000 in American Rescue Plan funds to be
44 allocated for the use of matching grant funds for applications for broadband
45 expansion submitted by local service providers to the State of Wisconsin; and

46
47 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that any funds remaining after
48 the funding of any State of Wisconsin broadband grants may be used for the
49 funding of a Polk County sponsored broadband grant; and

50
51 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that after the evaluation and
52 funding of any State of Wisconsin or Polk County sponsored broadband grants,
53 any remaining funds from this allocation may be used for broadband
54 educational, promotional and accessibility initiatives for Polk County residents;
55 and

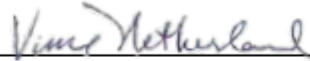
56
57 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the match for any one grant opportunity
58 can not exceed 15% of the total amount of the grant application or 200,000.00,
59 whichever is lesser; and
60

61 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that all proposals for matching funds
62 presented to the County Administrator by local services providers, shall be
63 reviewed by the County Administrator and if recommended for funding must be
64 reviewed and approved by the General Government Committee prior to
65 acceptance; and
66

67 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, all proposals considered for approval shall
68 include the no cost to consumer provision of a 500-foot distance of a drop to a
69 structure; and
70

71 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the General Government Director is
72 directed to amend the 2022 Operating and Capital Budget to reflect the
73 approved expenditures herein.
74

SUBMITTED BY:



Amendments to Resolution 07-22 as approved by the County Board of Supervisors on 2/22/2022, have been incorporated in this document.

**TOWN OF MCKINLEY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS RESOLUTION TO APPROVE BROADBAND
EXPANSION PROPOSAL FROM STARWIRE TECHNOLOGIES**

WHEREAS, Town of McKinley (the "Town") strives for expansion of fiber optic broadband infrastructure and service available to its residents;

WHEREAS, Starwire Technologies ("Starwire") is a provider of broadband services to the area in or around the Town;

WHEREAS, Starwire presented a proposal for expansion of broadband services in the Town (the "Starwire Proposal") at a Town Board meeting on February 16, 2022. The Starwire Proposal shall be part of a Wisconsin Public Service Commission (PSC) Broadband Expansion Grant submitted as part of the FY2022 grant cycle.

WHEREAS, the Starwire Proposal sets forth a Town contribution of \$18,000 in American Rescue Plan Act ("ARPA") funds, and such contribution assumes additional funds will be provided by a Starwire contribution and grant award funds.

WHEREAS, pursuant to Wis. Stat 65.90(5)(a), the Town Board must approve the Town contribution of \$18,000 set forth in the Starwire Proposal by a 2/3 member vote. Execution of the Starwire Proposal will be dependent upon successful award of the respective PSC Broadband Expansion Grant.

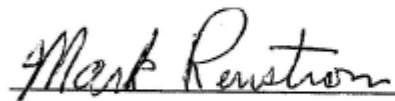
WHEREAS, the Town Board reviewed and discussed the contents of this resolution and the Town Board determined that it is in the best interest of the Town to commit Town funds in the amount of \$18,000 in ARPA funds and approve the Starwire Proposal based on the conditions detailed below.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Town Board determines the following:

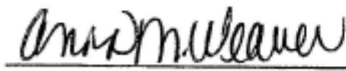
1. Recitals. The Recitals set forth above are true and correct and are hereby incorporated into this Resolution.
2. Public Partnership. The Town Board's approval of this resolution solidifies the Town as a public partner for the PSC Broadband Expansion Grant described in the Starwire Proposal.
3. Approval of Starwire Proposal: Conditions. The Town Board hereby approves the Starwire Proposal and commits \$18,000 in ARPA funds to the broadband expansion project with the following conditions:

- a. The broadband expansion project must be completed to the PSC's satisfaction, which is determined by approval of the final reimbursement to Starwire by the PSC grant funds.
4. Health, Welfare and Safety. The Town Board's approval of this Resolution and the Starwire Proposal is beneficial to the health, welfare and safety of the Town's resident, taxpayers, and visitors.

The content of this Resolution was reviewed and discussed at a special Town Board meeting on February 17, 2022 and voted to recommend that the Town Board of supervisors to approve.



Mark Renstrom
Town of McKinley Chairman



Anna M. Weaver
Town of McKinley Clerk



OAK FOREST™
RETREAT & CONFERENCE CENTER

February 11, 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

As Director of Oak Forest Retreat and Conference Center, I agree to enter into a partnership with Starwire Technologies should they be granted funds from the Wisconsin Public Service Commission (PSC) Broadband Expansion Grant. Oak Forest would be willing to commit to this partnership up to \$12,000 for Starwire to deliver fiber optic internet service to our facility.

We are a Christian retreat & conference center hosting 5,000 guests a year, bringing additional income to our local community. We have struggled for 21 years with poor internet service and our guests continually tell us how slow and intermittent it is. We currently have satellite-based internet service, but it has severe latency issues and speeds vary greatly. Rarely does it meet our demand.

Having Star Wire internet would be a game changer for us out here in the rural area. Please give earnest consideration to helping Starwire provide us with up-to-date internet services.

Sincerely,

Ryan L. Reissner

Ryan L. Reissner
Site Director
Oak Forest Retreat and Conference Center
2824 130th St.
Frederic, WI 54837
(715) 327-4500
ryan.reissner@oakforestcenter.org

Town of McKinley

2527 15th Street
Cumberland, WI 54829

Mark Renstrom
Chairman

Anna Weaver
Clerk

Mandy Rouzer
Treasurer

Robert Wurm
Supervisor

Kevin Wickstrom
Supervisor

February 17, 2022

RE: Starwire Technologies LLC Broadband Expansion Grant

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Town of McKinley wishes to express our complete support of Starwire Technologies in their application for the Public Service Commission (PSC) Broadband Expansion Grant.

The Town of McKinley Board of Supervisors has become aware, in the recent years, of the growing needs of our residents for improved Internet access. Our existing Internet provider is not able to offer a service that satisfies the ever increasing need of our residents. The growth of home business, education, employment opportunities and home healthcare services are just several areas where fiber optic Internet services would greatly enhance these opportunities. The McKinley Town Hall currently serves as a disaster command center for any emergency occurring in the McKinley area. A fiber optic service would improve our ability to deal with such an occurrence in a more efficient response.

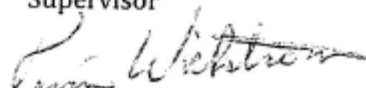
The Town of McKinley is willing to commit approximately 50 percent of its allocated ARPA funds to show its strong commitment to this project. We encourage the PSC to consider this proposal and help improve the lives of our Town of McKinley residents.

Respectfully,

Mark Renstrom
Chairman

Robert Wurm
Supervisor

Kevin Wickstrom
Supervisor





Vince Netherland, County Administrator
100 Polk County Plaza, Suite 220
Balsam Lake, WI 54810
715-485-9286
vince.netherland@polkcountywi.gov

LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR PSC BROADBAND EXPANSION GRANT

To Whom it May Concern:

Polk County Government fully supports the project proposal and application to the Public Service Commission submitted by Starwire Technologies to improve broadband internet service in the Town of McKinley and nearby areas. Polk County is committed to partnering with Starwire Technologies in this endeavor to ensure that more of our citizens, students, businesses, and visitors have improved internet access.

To support the expansion of Broadband in Polk County, the County Board of Supervisors has recently passed a resolution that creates a matching grant of funds for any PSC-approved Broadband Expansion Grant project affecting Polk County. Specifically, Polk County is committed to using recently awarded ARPA funds to match up to 15% of the total project cost up to \$200,000 per project. This resolution is attached for your review.

The County has designated the expansion of Broadband throughout our County as one its top priorities and is committing funds and staff to ensure this happens. In addition to the matching funds mentioned above, Polk County has also been working with various organizations, including WEDC, Polk County EDC, UW Extension, WCWRPC, PSC Broadband Office, and Momentum West to develop communication strategies to enhance broadband adoption, diversity, and education.

In addition, Polk County recently contracted with an outside consultant to identify areas in the county that lack sufficient internet service. The area targeted in Starwire's application directly addresses one of the areas and will satisfy the needs of students in multiple school districts as well as numerous businesses and households.

It is our belief that teaming up with our local internet providers and the PSC, we can cover Polk County from border to border with fiber optic cable and set us on a road to better communication, learning, healthcare, and business. Starwire Technologies has already made a substantial investment in Polk County's broadband availability and the County supports their request for this grant. The extension of their internet service to this area would greatly benefit both the local residents and the entire county.

Thank you for your consideration!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Vince Netherland".

Enclosure: attachment

2896 130th St.
Frederic, WI. 54837

January 19, 2022

To Whom it May Concern,

We strongly support Starwire Technologies' application for a grant to extend their service to our rural area in western Wisconsin. We do not currently have internet service at our Wisconsin home because the cost is prohibitive. The only provider serving our area at present uses a technology that would require digging a trench for a line to our home at a minimum cost of \$1,000. For retirees like us, that's simply too expensive. Consequently, we use our cell phones to access the internet or drive three miles into town to use the internet service at the public library.

This home is our cabin and used part-time. But with reliable, affordable internet service, we'd be able to spend more time there, which would be a boost to the local economy and community. Having internet service would also increase our home's value. We'd also be able to monitor our furnace remotely, which would alert us to problems during our harsh Wisconsin winters and protect our investment.

Starwire Technologies has a good reputation and we'd be grateful to have their service available to us.

Regards,

Lynda McDonnell

I am writing in support of the Starwire grant application for broadband expansion.

Here is our situation. Our property in Section 12 of Luck Township, Polk County, has no landline, and it would cost at least \$1,000 to install one to serve our house to receive broadband service in that way. Starwire has existing service in Frederic, three miles away, but it does not reach our property because of an intervening ridge left by a glacial moraine.

Using cellular service to connect to the Internet for work-related tasks exhausts our monthly data allowance quickly. We sometimes have had to drive to Frederic and park outside the public library to squat on its wireless signal but it's frigid to do so this time of year.

I am a local reelected official and depend on broadband access to connect me to meetings of the board on which I serve. Having a wi-fi connection at our property would also allow us to monitor the interior temperature while we are away.

Expanded service would be a boon to this area by bringing faster speeds at a reasonable cost.

--Steve Brandt

sbrandt51@gmail.com

Hi there,

I was informed by our McKinley town board that Starwire may be looking to extend high-speed internet coverage to our area (McKinley outside of Cumberland on Highway 48). This letter is to STRONGLY ENCOURAGE expansion into our community for the incredible benefits it can offer families, retirees, homeschoolers, and businesses.

When we looked to move back to the Midwest from Raleigh, North Carolina, our goal was to be closer to family, and the area we grew up, to raise our children. As a homeschooling family, and considering I work remotely from home, internet was a KEY factor in determining where we could live. When we found our place in McKinley listed for sale, we rolled the dice and HOPED the internet from CenturyLink would meet our needs and blindly made the move. After moving in, we came to find out that the fastest speed CenturyLink could offer was 3mbps... As you know, that won't cut it for much more than email/light browsing. As a result, I needed to rent office space in Cumberland and drive there each day to "work from home" within the Edina Real Estate office which was far from ideal...

This was our situation for two years until I was selected to be a part of Elon Musk/SpaceX's beta for Starlink. What a game changer!!! For \$500 in equipment and \$99/month, we were able to get online at our home with stable download speeds around 250mbps. While \$500 in equipment is expensive, I was able to justify it as that was the equivalent cost to just 4 months of my rented office space. From there on out, I was SAVING money with Starlink. Now, it's not all good with Starlink. First, it's an upcoming tech so outages and downtime are a part of the deal. Also, each "cell" for Starlink has limited capacity and as such, our neighbors can't benefit from the option as our geographic cell is at capacity according to Starlink. Even if neighbors COULD get access through Starlink, it is much harder for others to justify the equipment and ongoing charges when compared to their existing options. Finally, it can be weather dependent not only for interference but also potential damage to the expensive dish mounted on our roof.

Whether through Starlink, or any other high speed option, one thing that can't be ignored is the incredible impact that access to high speed internet has on modern American life. Especially through COVID, employees have the option to work from home but are tied to locations that have high speed internet. The same goes for homeschooling (either temporary or permanent) or any business idea that requires decent internet speeds. The economic impact that high speed internet can offer small communities is incredible when folks from around the country can bring their ideas, capital, tax dollars and unique culture to any area. Moreover, regular day to day life continues to rely more heavily on internet access (farm equipment, security systems, smart appliances, remote monitoring, etc.). Not having high speed internet access means you are left behind as the world moves forward.

Future growth in our area of NW Wisconsin REQUIRES affordable and accessible high speed internet. This is why federal grants are made available and why the little township of McKinley is willing to direct our apportioned grant dollars to an ISP that shares the same commitment to advancing access in our region. Grant money or not, I hope that Starwire decides to move forward QUICKLY with expansion to our area. I will drop Starlink instantly to reap the rewards of a wired internet option and also to support the cause overall.

On Wisconsin!!! :)

Gabriel Nelli

715-456-5456

gmnelli@gmail.com

163 250th Ave

Cumberland, WI 54829



2824 130TH ST, UNT A, FREDERIC, WI 54837, USA [Change Address](#)

855-448



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855-44



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This is the speed with the best offer at your address!



478 STATE HWY 48, CUMBERLAND, WI 54829, USA [Change Address](#)

855



Great! You qualify for up to 10 **Mbps** with unlimited data.
This is the speed with the best offer at your address!



541 FOOTES LAKE LN, CUMBERLAND, WI 54829, USA [Change Address](#)

855-4



Great! You qualify for up to 10 **Mbps** with unlimited data.
This is the speed with the best offer at your address!



2435 35TH ST, CUMBERLAND, WI 54829, USA [Change Address](#)

855-



Great! First let's choose an Internet speed.
Up to 10 **Mbps** with unlimited data is available at your address.